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Mississippi Department of Human Services Launches Effort to Improve Outcomes for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care to Adulthood

Teen Advisory Board Releases Recommendations For Designing Foster Care Services In Mississippi to Better Meet The Needs Of Young People Ages 14-21

[Raymond, Miss.] July 18, 2014—Today the Mississippi Department of Human Services, with support from the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and the Foundation for the Mid South, launched a new effort dedicated to improving outcomes for the approximately 1,200 young people ages 14-21 in foster care in Mississippi. The announcement coincided with the conclusion of the Youth Leadership Conference, an annual conference devoted to examining issues critical to young people.

“The Mississippi Department of Human Services is embracing a new vision for foster care and is pleased to include recommendations from youth who have firsthand experience in the system. Developing a practice that truly enhances their achievements and improves their ability to achieve a successful future is paramount to the agency,” said Kim Shackelford, deputy administrator for the Mississippi Department of Children’s Services, Division of Family and Children’s Services.

At today’s launch, the Mississippi Teen Advisory Board—a group of 30 young people in the Mississippi foster care system—released Mississippi Youth Voice, a set of recommendations designed to help the state take a more youth-centered approach to designing foster care services. Download the report [here](#).

“To improve outcomes for young people in foster care, we need to authentically engage them through active participation in planning their futures,” said Leonard Burton, chief operating officer of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. “This means not just asking them for their opinions, but valuing what they have to say, and using their feedback to inform and design supports and services tailored to their needs as emerging adults.”

Mississippi Youth Voice aims to do just that, outlining a range of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners in Mississippi as they work to improve foster care services. Specifically the report calls for: expanded access to youths’ personal documentation; a voice in decisions regarding their future; better communication with social workers; greater emphasis on maintaining and repairing family connections; and establishment of an avenue of communications for those in care who may need to make a report about their concerns.

“We are grateful to the Jim Casey Initiative for its commitment to foster youth in Mississippi as we work together for their successful and sustainable transition to adulthood,” said Gwendolyn S. Prater, Dean, College of Public Service (Ex-Officio), Jackson State University and a member of the Community Partnership Board. “It will require the total village's effort - business, education including higher education, health and mental health, and child and family organizations partnering with foster youth to ensure successful implementation of this very important initiative. We are also fortunate to have the Foundation for the Mid South as our local lead organization.”

For more information about the Mississippi Youth Opportunities Initiative, visit <http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org>.

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About the Mississippi Department of Human Services

As an organization, the Mississippi Department of Human Services is dedicated to providing services to people in need by optimizing all available resources to sustain the family unit and encourage traditional family values thereby promoting self-sufficiency and personal responsibility for all Mississippians. The mission for the MDHS, Division of Family and Children's Services is to lead the state in protecting children and youth from abuse, neglect and exploitation by providing services to promote safe and stable families.

About the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative aims to ensure that young people—primarily those between ages 14 and 25—make successful transitions from foster care to adulthood. We do this by working nationally, in states, and locally to improve policies and practices, promote youth engagement, apply evaluation and research, and create community partnerships. Our work creates opportunities for young people to achieve positive outcomes in permanence, education, employment, housing, health, financial capability, and social capital.

About the Foundation for the Mid South

The mission of the Foundation for the Mid South is to invest in people and strategies that build philanthropy and promote racial, social, and economic equity in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The Foundation for the Mid South was established to bring together the public and private sectors and focus their resources on increasing social and economic opportunity. Our approach is straightforward and long term: enable communities to develop solutions to better conditions and improve lives.